

## **TUNISIA'S DOMESTIC POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY FROM PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA TO PRESIDENT MARZOUKI**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Tunisia's domestic political climate continues to get a new definition; from the economic crisis to the elections, to the constant protests and sit-ins. This is due in part to the infamous Arab Spring<sup>i</sup> that added a twist to Tunisia's foreign relations too, presenting a dilemma for many countries that deal with Tunisia. This paper studies the domestic politics and foreign policies of Tunisia from independence to date chronicling the period of five governments, three of which happened after the Arab Spring and how Tunisia relates regionally as a result. It does so by looking at the foreign policy determinants such as the nature of the state, the nature and interests of these governments' leaders' capabilities, the decision-making system they implored and lastly their perceptions and role conception in foreign policy execution.

**KEYWORDS:** Tunisia, Foreign Policy, Arab Spring, Africa, International Relations

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **OVERVIEW**

Tunisia has a small territory, a small professional and noninterventionist army that plays no political role but with a doctrine of commitment to republicanism. Like the 1959 constitution, the 2014 constitution<sup>ii</sup> proclaims Tunisia as a republic with Arabic as its language and Islam as its religion. Freedom of expression and the right to form political parties and associations are guaranteed, as is freedom of religious belief. Candidates for president must be Muslim, at least 35 years old and be Tunisian citizens by birth. Under the new constitution, the president acts as head of state, commander in chief of the armed forces and conducts foreign policy but cannot declare war or enter treaties without the approval of the Assembly of the People's Representatives. This body holds legislative authority and can impeach the president with a two-thirds vote but the president can dissolve it. He exercises executive authority on limited domains along with the prime minister who acts as chief of government. Following legislative elections, the president appoints a member of the winning party or coalition to form a cabinet and members serve five-year terms. The President can only be reelected once. If the cabinet cannot be formed within four months, the president may dissolve the assembly and call for new legislative elections.

Tunisian army's unwillingness to play any active role in the Arab spring and restraint of intervention in political processes, indirectly helped in the demise of former President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali' and the subsequent transition. Tunisia is a unique case in a region where militaries are the powerful and strongholds of regimes in countries such as Egypt, Syria, Libya, Algeria, Yemen, and Sudan. Since its independence in 1956 that ushered in a Presidential system, Tunisia's politics has been marred with squabbles on the role of Islam, power struggles between its politicians and accusations of incompetent governments by its citizen. Polarization existed: the vast divide between the vibrant secularist liberals, the conservative Islamist parties from pre-independence order. After decades of accepting the new secularist order

and encouraged by the success of the Iranian revolution, the latter demanded a purely religious state and have shown their willingness to bring the societal change they wanted by violent means like attacking cultural activities they deemed un-Islamic. In response, the authorities banned all external sign such as the Islamic veil called hijab for women and men wearing a beard in state institutions. Tunisia was authoritarian. It was only in 1981 that new political parties were permitted, with multiparty system granted in 1988. However, the first multiparty elections held in 1989 were marred with wide spread fraud and the ruling Neo-Destour party (later renamed RCD<sup>iii</sup>) stole the elections. New political parties had no financial or organizational structure to mobilize serious opposition, and the all-powerful ruling party contributed to the current state of political decay.

The exclusion of Islamists from politics came to an end following the downfall and departure of Ben Ali in January 2011, the Ennahda Movement<sup>iv</sup> officially became registered as a legal political party and following the October 23, 2011 elections for a constituent assembly, it emerged as the strongest party in the country. In the same year, the party succeeded in forming a cabinet and dominated national affairs. But governing was not an easy task for the Islamists. After a long period of deadlocks and no progress, and under the pressure of a vibrant civil society and widespread unrests that lasted the whole summer of 2014, Ennahda's leadership showed willingness to compromise, especially after the fall of Egypt's President Mohamed Morsi and their Egyptian counterparts of the Muslim Brotherhood. Pressed also by a new phenomenon called Islamic terrorism that hit the country, they agreed to voluntarily exit from power and allowed a caretaker neutral technocratic government to govern until elections. The decision to step down eased the growing political tensions and legislative and presidential elections are due to be held by December 2014.

Until the January 2011 Revolution, the government's capabilities had been displayed with fairly good economic results. Tunisia had a well-diversified economy, although dominated by a few large sectors. The economy depends heavily on phosphates exports, a growing manufacturing sector that has received much investment, and agricultural products. Tourism is also a significant source of revenue and foreign exchange, as are remittances from migrant workers living abroad. After a brief experiment with socialism in the 1960s, Tunisia shifted its economic doctrine toward a mixed planned and market economy. However, the economy fell into crisis in the early 1980s, the result of an overreliance on oil revenues, foreign aid, and expatriate labour remittances. In the mid-1980s a comprehensive program was introduced to liberalize the economy. Public-sector reforms, deregulation, and privatization have also been implemented. However, the program had social costs, as unemployment and poverty levels rose.

Nonetheless, the GDP had been growing well over two decades but slowed in 2009-10, due to the global economic crisis and its impact on Tunisia's main trading partner, Europe. The Arab Spring further dented the economy, with growth plummeting in 2011. It disrupted industrial production, paralyzed transport networks, and resulted in the loss of jobs as many foreign companies withdrew from the country. Tourist numbers dropped by a third after the revolution. After the instability that followed the revolution, the country's economy is back on its feet, though not yet at pre-Revolution levels. Foreign direct investment has been rising, reaching 942.3m Tunisian dinars at the end of the first five months of 2012, an increase of 14.4 % compared to the same period in 2010.<sup>v</sup> Tourist numbers have rebounded in 2012, with hotel occupancy also are looking good. GDP growth has shown sign of life. Growth and government investment resulted in over 90,000 new jobs in 2012, but mostly in the public sector. Unemployment fell from the first to the second quarter of 2012, in comparison to the same period in 2011.

In the end, Tunisia managed to remain stable and cope with the pressures from its internal factors and external environment, in particular from the civil war in neighboring Libya that brought in more than one million refugees. Since the eighties, Tunisian political pragmatism has been built on a long tradition of open doors for dialogue, regardless of differences between political actors. This enabled the country to conduct a foreign policy that rationally coped with external requirements, as state elites commanded the legitimacy and institutions managed to still respond to domestic demands while the government sustained fluctuating levels of public support. While realism tends to take this capacity for granted, post-revolution Tunisia government legitimacy remains problematic and a matter of considerable controversy. According to advocates of what might be called the “domestic vulnerability model” of foreign policymaking, the main threat to unstable Third World regimes is domestic, and foreign policy is a key instrument of survival at home, whether used to build domestic legitimacy through nationalism or to secure external support against domestic opposition [1]. This model is relevant in-so-far as Tunisia.

- **Habib Bourguiba (1957-1987)**

In analyzing the relationship between internal politics and foreign policies, one has to stress the role of decision makers in determining the type of foreign policy to adopt.

Bourguiba was the grand figure of Tunisia's independence movement and Tunisia's founding president. He had a conviction that Tunisia's foreign relations had a future with the West and also believing that there were positive economic, cultural, and social legacies of colonialism to be exploited in the relation with France. However relations with France hit a snag between 1958 and 1962 caused by Tunisia's support for the Algerian struggle for independence; in February 1958, the French bomb-raided the Tunisian village of Sakiet Sidi Youssef while pursuing Algerian rebels across the border; the French military's use of the Bizerte port and airfield facility till 1962; and the suspension of all French aid after Tunisia abruptly nationalized foreign-owned landholdings. He generally managed to secure a lasting and cordial friendship with France and worked tirelessly to develop good relations with the US, being eager to link Tunisia in to the technologies of modernization.

He preferred pragmatism over ideology. He didn't allow his alignment with the West to interfere with positive trade policies with developing countries and what was then the Soviet bloc. Bourguiba maintained good relations with both the East, in pursuit of export markets and bilateral trade, and the West, for economic and military assistance, thereby reducing the country's dependency on either one. Bourguiba's pragmatism also extended to the Arab world. Rejecting ideological constraints, he advocated a moderate and constructive position toward Israel, calling on the Palestinians to accept the UN partition in his 1964 famous Jericho speech; nonetheless, he supported the rights of the Palestinians and offered the Palestine Liberation Organization a base when it was expelled from Lebanon in 1982.<sup>vi</sup> He also called for Arab unity based on mutually advantageous cooperation rather than political integration.

- **Zine al Abidine Ben Ali (1987-2011)**

Ben Ali took power from Bourguiba through one of the quietest and bloodless coup d'états in history, under whom he was prime minister and intelligence chief. Under him Tunisia followed much the same path; the need for regional security and the desire to advance economic interests and guided foreign policy. Therefore, Tunisia maintained a basic stability in the economic, political, and social arenas. He instituted many economic reforms and definitely rid the country of its socialistic legacy. He made the transition from a Third World to a developing country with an open economy,

becoming a darling of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Now turning to his politics, Ben Ali moved quickly to crush the Islamist movement in Tunisia. Not only did his government ban the Islamist party Ennahda, led by Rachid al Ghannouchi, but it sharply curtailed political and press freedoms and harassed and jailed hundreds of political opponents. At first, Ben Ali was expected to favor a somewhat less secular government than Bourguiba's, with a more moderate and conciliatory approach toward religious fundamentalists. But that didn't last. His government of technocrats had been increasingly infiltrated by the military and the security apparatus. Moves towards political openness were reversed and the Tunisian government had become the target of international criticism for its deteriorating human rights record [2].

It is during his 23d year of rule that the Arab Spring occurred. Chaos and unrest started after Mohammed Bouazizi<sup>vii</sup> committed suicide, starting the uprising that swept Tunisia and the whole region. His plight became the symbol of injustice and economic hardship afflicting many Tunisians under his regime. The suicide was followed by a series of copycat self-immolations in Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania and Saudi Arabia [3] and inspired street protests throughout the country against high unemployment, poverty, and political repression. His government's response to the protests attracted international media attention and criticism as many got killed in their encounter with the police. As it came out that excessive force was used, Ben Ali sacked his Interior Minister Rafik Belhaj Kacem and promised to get to the bottom of the deaths. This did not quell the protests but rather the opposition basked in the glory of these protests and he was forced by circumstances to make concessions promising to step down in 2014 when his term in office comes to an end. In another bid to end demonstrations, he vowed to institute a variety of political, economic, and social reforms. Protesters dismissed these concessions as a desperate ploy to remain in power. As things took a nasty turn with protester-police clashes leaving a trail of deaths, Ben Ali stepped down from the presidency and fled the country for Saudi Arabia. His ouster was the first domino to fall in the Arab Spring. Surprisingly, according to recent polls conducted by Transparency International and Tunisian market research firm 3C Etudes<sup>viii</sup>, over a third of Tunisians regret the time of Ben Ali, explaining this by an uncertain future and existing problems, e.g, the deteriorating security situation, unemployment, the shrinking purchasing power and corruption.

If we describe Tunisia foreign policy in terms of the classifications Pro-west, pro-communist and non-aligned, then throughout Ben Ali's rule, his government maintained a decidedly pro-Western path, while keeping the country in its Arab and Muslim environment, at least officially. Attempts to win Western assistance for development funds showed his willingness to expand ties with the West, but Tunisia's low profile in the US continued to limit its ability to gain the recognition that could lead to increased trade, tourism, etc. His dealings with France had ups and downs, with an all-time low in 1992, when the French convicted his brother of drug-trafficking offenses and condemned him to ten years in a French prison. However, French very big economic interests in Tunisia and its fear of Islamic extremists in France led to greater security cooperation between the two countries and a willingness to overlook his repression of the Islamist movement Ennahda, the lack of democratic political reforms, censorship of the media and the human rights violations [4]. Through this support, Tunisia was the first North African country to sign an association accord with the European Union in July 1995. He was seen as a bulwark against instability in the region and against the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in order to secure economic progress, political stability and safe guard French and European national-security interests.

Just as argues Clapham (1996), he had a freer choice between an alignment strategy, and a non-aligned, balancing strategy with the opportunity to tap benefits or incur costs [5]. He chose the balancing strategy as he kept quiet relations

with Libyan President Mu‘ammar al-Gadhafi, whom many in the West loathed so much, at the same time keeping millions of European tourists coming for vacation in Tunisia. It is debatable though that the domestic threats that Ben Ali faced determined his act of omni-balancing, therefore reducing the scope of his independence as a leader. Through the excessive use of his security apparatus, he was domestically a secure leader who remained in power for 23 years. The “leadership dominant model,” assumes that leaders, facing few institutional constraints at home, are able to translate their idiosyncratic personal values, styles and pathologies into foreign policy [6].<sup>ix</sup> In his authoritarian regime, he faced informal domestic constraints and he used foreign policy to protect his regime's legitimacy. Hinnebusch & Ehteshami (2000) opine that legitimacy in states where imperialism remains a perceived threat and where little welfare and few political rights are typically delivered tends to be exceptionally dependent on foreign-policy performance [7].

- **Mohamed Ghannouchi & Fouad Mebazaa (2011)**

Ghannouchi was Tunisia's prime Minister under Ben Ali. After Ben Ali stepped down on January 14, 2011, he took over the reins but ruled Tunisia just for a day after declaring himself interim ruler. The following day he was replaced by Speaker of Parliament, Fouad Mebazaa as per the constitution, as the interim President. He went back to his position of prime Minister. Ghannouchi announced formation of a unity government, which still had Ministers from Ben Ali's government. He bowed to pressure from protesters, stepped down and chose not to run for office in the 2011 elections. On the other hand, Mebazaa presiding over the caretaker government named Beji Caid Essebsi Prime Minister with a mission to lead Tunisia to its first free and fair elections for a Constituent assembly. His rule is symbolized most powerfully by its post-Arab spring decree making processes compared to other countries that were rocked by the Arab Spring. His reforms in the media, justice and security sectors are commendable. The progressive Code of Personal Status, which was introduced in 1956, has been amended to affirm and enhance women's political, social, and economic roles. This later led to the 2014 constitution, guaranteeing equality of men and women before the law.

- **Moncef Marzouki (Incumbent)**

In the first free elections in 2011, Tunisia's constitutional assembly elected Marzouki, former activist, who returned from exile in France after the fall of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. He is now leading a Troika government (the ruling coalition of Islamist party Ennahda which won the elections, Marzouki own Arab Nationalist Congress for the Republic party (CPR), and secularist center-left Ettakatol party). He is widely respected for his opposition to former president Ben Ali. Once in power, Marzouki became a highly controversial and antagonizing character both inside and outside Tunisia. His government published a book Entitled *The Propaganda Apparatus Under Ben Ali: The Black Book*<sup>x</sup>, that looked into how the previous regime used the media to serve its own political agenda and sought to control the flow of information coming out of Tunisia.<sup>xi</sup> But the opposition accused him of trespassing his limited prerogatives for political gains. If at first, he was seen as a likely counterweight to the Islamist Ennahda party which became the country's dominant political force; his critics have accused him of being a pawn of that same Islamist party. This feeling has caused a Political polarization between the ‘troika’ and the progressive democratic opposition.

On the International front, Marzouki tried to have an aggressive foreign policy, using the limited prerogatives granted to him by the constituent assembly. But his actions were more erratic, when for instance he was the first Arab head of state to unilaterally cut diplomatic ties with Hafez Al Assad's Syria, taking Tunisia away from its traditionally balanced foreign policy.

Meanwhile, his foreign minister, Rafik Abdessalem, has played a lower profile, mostly meeting with counterparts of Tunisia's allies; His actions were hindered after outcries of nepotism failed to derail his nomination (he is Ennahdha leader Rached Ghannouchi's son-in-law). There is no doubt that for the period of Troika rule in Tunisia, Rached Ghannouchi's hand was felt heavily in politics. Despite not holding a position in government, it is widely believed that he was calling the shots in most political decisions, including foreign policy, aligning Tunisia on Qatar and Muslim Brotherhood ideologies. Ghannouchi is an active member of the international Muslim Brotherhood even though he tends to deny it. The Middle East Channel of Foreign Policy reveals that he exposed his party and himself to accusations of nepotism, constitutional meddling and running a parallel government [8].

Security threats from neighboring Libya are rising, dragging Tunisia into a new political crisis after months of relative calm. In 2013, two political assassinations targeted left wing political leaders Mohammed Brahmi<sup>xii</sup> and Chokri Belaid<sup>xiii</sup>) and radical Islamists were singled out, throwing Tunisia in political turmoil. Moroccan-Italian analyst Anna Mahjar-Barducci [9] describes the fear of many Tunisians that the country is being manipulated from afar, in particular, by Qatar. She also notes that while Qatar sends \$500 million to Tunisia in aid, it continues to host Ben Ali son-in-law Sakher el Materi, who may be in possession of up to \$5 billion in stolen assets from Tunisia. Meanwhile, the U.S. and the European Union donated millions more. However, both foreign minister Abdessalem nor Prime Minister Jebali have publicly challenged Marzouki's course and the foreign ministry has not played a high profile role in the new government's direction. But, Mohamed el Dahshan [10] asserts in foreign Policy Magazine that Tunisia is adopting a more muscular foreign policy after its leadership ushering in the Arab Spring. He argues that this will start with the Arab Maghreb Union, a long moribund project that the Marzouki administration tried to restart. Marzouki visited Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania in an effort to give a new life the sleepy trans-Maghreb project.

## RELATIONS WITH NORTH AFRICAN AND ARAB STATES

*"Tunisia's interests are above any foreign relationships, even if it's on the expense of our allies."- Zoubair Chhoudi, Ennahda press attaché.*

This section tackles the relations of Tunisia with its immediate environment or neighbours. Prof Steven R. David argues that it is required by circumstance that policy makers must balance between internal and external pressures, in a decision context shaped by the main location of threats and opportunities [11]. The regional level combines both Tunisia's immediate strategic environment; and the transnational ideological issues of (pan) Arabism and Islam as documented below.

Despite good ties with the West, Tunisia was home to the Arab League and the PLO until late 1993, the government served as a low-key and friendly advisor to two institutions which catapulted its international profile. Tunis played an active role in Arab politics with the usual exchanges of Arab leaders and encouraging moderation on the part of the Palestinians and offering Israelis the promise of diplomatic recognition. However, lacking the wealth or the political clout or the dynastic confidence of its neighbors, its political voice remained rather meek. The period 1990-91 was a time of difficult political lessons for Tunisia's leaders. Their alliance with Saddam Hussain during the Kuwait invasion came with economic and political costs from the West and Gulf countries. Tunisia suffered a public relations debacle for this stance and economic problems followed.

With the uncertain future and stability of the Arab Maghreb Union, Tunisia increasingly concentrated efforts on promoting the Arab League's Arab Free Trade Area, and in advancing regional economics. Some of this political ground was regained, however, when Ben Ali strongly supported the 1991 Madrid conference and engaged in behind-the-scenes assistance to further Israeli-Arab mutual recognition. Tunisia emerged as an accurate barometer of Israeli-Palestinian relations. After the Oslo accords, the establishment of "interest sections" with Israel involved an exchange of (low-level) diplomats between Tunis and Tel Aviv. The chill of the Netanyahu era led to almost non-existent relations. The advent of Ehud Barak warmed relations—until a complete break took place in October 2000 amidst the Al-Aqsa intifada. A State Department official closely involved with the matter called this step by Tunis "disappointing" while recognizing that it could not continue a business-as-usual relationship with Israel given the high emotions in the Arab world [12].

Just next door across the border, Libya is continually in instability and this alone dominates Tunisia foreign policy concerns today. Following the start of the uprising against Gadhafi, Tunisia opened its doors and its stores to Libyans, on both sides. Hundreds of thousands of refugees flooded across the border and Tunisia began shipping tons of food and water supplies to those stuck in Libya. On the other hand, Libya began exporting weapons and paramilitaries to Tunisia. The continued instability in Libya has forced Tunisian authorities to close its border on several occasions, effectively closing off trade from this important market [13]. An issue which has dragged on for months has been the incarceration of Libya's former prime minister Baghdadi Mahmoudi. Tunisia ended up extraditing him to Libyan authorities, who have repeatedly asked that he be returned. That had created a crisis between President Marzouki who refused the extradition and Prime Minister Jebali who cleared the extradition overruling Marzouki.

What has always marked Tunisian relations with Libya is strict pragmatism. Prior to the Libyan uprising economic relations between the two were highly positive with Tunisia favoured in tourism, remittances, FDI and oil imports in Libya. Throughout the NATO bombardment and uprising against Gadhafi, Tunisia remained discreetly engaged, but a neutral observer on the outside. While Western governments fear the chaos ensuing from the next government in Libya, Tunisians hope that, just as under Gadhafi in the last three decades, there will be no bumps in this important strategic relationship. However the number one concern that could be straining this otherwise beneficial relationship is the vast number of arms that pouring out of Libya into Tunisia and the fact that Libya has become a training ground for Jihadis and terrorists, including Tunisians.

Tunisian nationals have been implicated in violent extreme acts in Mali, Algeria, Iraq and Syria. They share a common history of attempts at North African unity, culminating in the creation of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU or, in its French acronym, UMA) [14]. For Tunisia, the presence of powerful Algeria on one side, and maverick Libya on the other, has inevitably posed major concerns and one of the obstacles to North African integration since 1994. As Joffe (1993) has observed, the fate of moving towards regional integration in North Africa has also depended to a significant extent on the region's relations with Europe [15]. With the new government in place, Tunisian authorities have expressed their desire to re-start talks on the integration of Maghreb Union. The move attempts to show Marzouki as a statesman, as well as project Tunisia's power in the region. Tunisia may hope to benefit from popular goodwill among Maghreb populations as a way to kick start its diplomacy. On the domestic front, Marzouki's initiative will show that despite Tunisia's newly important relationship with countries like Qatar, regional ties remain important. However, this is unlikely to happen considering the ever strained relationship between Algeria and Morocco, the two giants of the region.

Gulf countries support was seen by some as critical to Ennahda's organization and ultimate victory in the October 2011 elections. Ennahda leaders have called for greater investment from the Gulf in Tunisia – including Islamic tourism and Islamic finances. This is unlikely to amount to much. Oil rich countries will undoubtedly look at investment opportunities in Tunisia. Reports that Qatar was to help Tunisia float its currency surfaced late last year. The Syrian uprising is causing a headache in Tunisia's internal and foreign policies. The debate over Syria, however, is much more domestic than it is geopolitical. The recall of Tunisia's ambassador to Syria in 2012 caused uproar among Tunisian opposition parties and sparked protests on the internet.

As in many other parts of the Arab world, views on Syria are divided. Many see the uprising as a conspiracy by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and their Western allies to bring war back to the Middle East. Others see the bloodletting as symptomatic of the same kind of Arab dictator, Tunisia deposed just three years ago. Opposition parties see an opportunity to confront Ennahda as they see the government's actions as a payback to Qatar for supporting Tunisia (and Ennahda) after the revolution. A common theme among civil society opponents of Ennahda is to claim that Tunisia went from being subservient to France and the West under Ben Ali to being subservient to Qatar under Ennahda. This plays into widespread anxieties in Tunisia over foreign interference into its sovereignty.<sup>xiv</sup>

In June 2014, the caretaker technocratic government announced that it was reopening a liaison bureau in Damascus to cater for the eight thousand strong Tunisian expatriates leaving in Syria.

Nonetheless, Tunisia's strategic position on the Mediterranean makes it unlikely that Gulf investment could supplant European investment in the country. Some observers see the Gulf as an exporter of middle-eastern culture. Many see the rise of Salafism in Tunisia as an import from the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia rigorist Wahabi Islam [16]. While it's true that Tunisians may be influenced by Gulf-based conservative television stations, radical Islam in Tunisia grew up in as much in the jails of Ben Ali's prisons as it has in any petro-state [17]. There is an undeniable fringe of Tunisian society, mainly low income and poorly educated, that looks much more toward Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries than to its Mediterranean neighbors. That, however, is an abstraction at this point as the reality of Tunisian culture is far away from Arabic peninsula culture.

## CONCLUSIONS

Foreign policy formulation and execution is not a walk in the park for any country. This study has revealed changes in the internal and external scenarios. As documented in some of the above chapters, much of the foreign policy calculations of Tunisian governments under different Presidents derived simply from their immediate environment, though not quite apart from international or sub-regional factors. Internally, the dictatorship tendencies of the first two governments seemed to conduct more dogmatic foreign policies in order to grip onto power, while the post-revolution ones had a more flexible approach because they had to adapt to a more unstable environment. It does not suffice how Tunisia has derived the benefits of foreign policy from alignment or non-alignment, but what is clear is that the revolution has proven more costly as internal politics still cannot result in peaceful actions but rather have created an atmosphere for possibilities of foreign meddling. It is not quite clear how relative autonomy versus dependency thinking have played out in the Tunisian foreign policy either. This is so because it resulted in frequent squabbles, coups and changes of governments that culminated in a showdown over power with the larger populace suffering as a result. The revolution has been the major recent factor that has totally changed Tunisian FP landscape but it is worthy to note that the country has not been transfixed with the Arab Spring and has been dealing with its own issues, trying to get its house in order [18].



The violence, anarchy, and destruction that has characterized other Arab revolutions and disturbed their FP was virtually absent in Tunisia [19]. However, one main worry of this paper is that the success of Ben Ali's regime in crushing and fragmenting opposition forces has created enormous obstacles to the construction of a new political order with democratic prospects at the moment. In so thoroughly dominating a political space, his absence has shown incoherence and inexperience of his opponents. In addition, there can never be a strong democracy in Tunisia as demanded by Tunisians and the world community when opposition forces are weak. We all expect public opinion to play a greater role in the foreign policy process where regimes have electoral accountability mechanisms. With the first two Governments, this was not the case. Now, three years after the revolution, policy adjustments are being set up with a clear influence from the Tunisian people. Public opinion is vital for good foreign policy and it is a fact on the ground in Tunisia.

The coming elections are hoped to provide the stability needed to build democratic institutions and rule of law in Tunisia. But just as the world didn't see the Tunisian revolt coming, nobody can be exactly sure what will come out as a result. What we know for sure is that Tunisia's new constitution and relative political progress give hope that the world will be dealing with moderates as opposed to Islamists who are always regarded as too extreme. If this can birth a 'Tunisian model' of political stability, sound economic vision and good FP, this will be a new paradigm for all Middle Eastern states [12] [20]. This will defy the popular belief among the circle of politics and the western media that the people of the Middle East and North Africa can only be ruled by force. It will even destroy the fallacious claim that principles of democracy are "*profoundly alien to the Muslim political tradition*" [21]. This new model can reconcile modernity, Islam and democracy. Tunisia therefore offers a new opportunity to introduce Islamic countries as equal players on the international scenes and in the international relations.

Tunisia has long played a moderate role with the intention to get along with every country. It struck what appears to be a balance between a pro-Western vision and its identity as an Arab country. In the turmoil of the Middle East, Tunisia proved that it could be vulnerable to outside factors. It is not clear yet what the final outcome will be, but in the meantime Tunisia and the Arab Spring will remain of an enduring interest to students of International Relations.

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- i Encyclopaedia Britannica defines Jasmine Revolution as a popular uprising in Tunisia that protested against corruption, poverty, and political repression and forced Pres. Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to step down in January 2011. The success of the uprising, which came to be known in the media as the “Jasmine Revolution,” inspired a wave of similar protests throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Retrieved on March 18, 2014 from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1753072/Jasmine-Revolution>
- ii Tunisia's Draft Constitution; an English Translation. As retrieved on March 29, 2014 from <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2014/01/21/tunisias-draft-constitution-an-english-translation/>
- iii The Democratic Constitutional Rally in 1988 and known by its French acronym, RCD
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- v Intissar Kherigi (Dec 2012) Retrieved on March 21, 2014 from <http://www.newafricanmagazine.com/blogs/guest-columns/tunisia-change-will-take-time>
- vi Also read Palestine: The dispersal of the PLO from Lebanon
- vii He was an unemployed 26-year-old, who protested government corruption by setting fire to himself outside a municipal office in the town of Sidi Bouzid in central Tunisia on December 17. Bouazizi, who had been supporting his family by selling fruit from a cart, was enraged when local officials repeatedly demanded bribes and confiscated his merchandise. Retrieved on March 18, 2014 from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1753072/Jasmine-Revolution>
- viii Read more at [http://www.africanmanager.com/site\\_eng/detail\\_article.php?art\\_id=16852](http://www.africanmanager.com/site_eng/detail_article.php?art_id=16852)
- ix For an assessment of this approach, see Bahgat Korany, *How Foreign Policy Decisions Are Made in the Third World*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986.
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- xii Mohamed Brahmi -- a leftist politician and Constituent Assembly member -- was shot dead outside his home in the al-Ghazala neighborhood of Tunis. His wife and daughter witnessed the gruesome scene. News of the murder, Tunisia's second political assassination in less than six months, spread quickly, triggering a chain of increasingly disruptive events throughout the country -- events likely to have a much more destabilizing effect than the assassination itself. Monica Marks (July 26, 2013). *Tunisia in Turmoil* retrieved on March 17, 2014 from [http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/07/26/tunisia\\_in\\_turmoil](http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/07/26/tunisia_in_turmoil)
- xiii The assassination of Chokri Belaid, a far-left politician, brought down Islamist Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali and pushed the ruling coalition to make a government reshuffle and relinquish the foreign, interior and justice ministries to independent ministers, which helped to stabilize the internal situation. Irina Sukhoparova (Feb, 2014). RT. Retrieved on March 18 from <http://rt.com/op-edge/tunisia-arab-spring-democratic-transition-579/>
- xiv See more from the blog at <http://kefteji.wordpress.com/2012/02/08/tunisias-new-government-5-things-weve-learned-about-tunisian-foreign-policy/>

